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ABSTRACT

One of the rationales for communication education is the popular cry that "we can't communicate"; another that communication strategies allow for goal achievement and tolerance for change and ambiguity and lead to physical and psychological survival. Most cogent, though, is the argument that a body of knowledge and practice in communication and communication education exists. Outlined here are principles and objectives of communication education in three areas of instruction: communication theory, communication research, and communication behaviors (skills). Finally, a comprehensive plan of communication education and curriculum is discussed. This curriculum runs from elementary through graduate education. In elementary school, the focus should be on development of communication behaviors. What theory there is should concern the affective domain. In secondary school, half the time should be spent on theory and half on skills. In college, there is a shift to theory and research in the affective domain. In graduate school, the emphasis should be on research in cognitive domain. (Author/JK)

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Communication Research Center

Illinois State University

A PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

by

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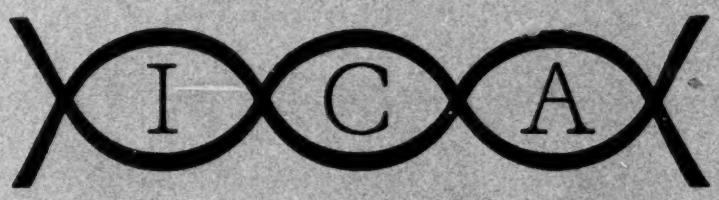

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

A PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

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This paper focuses upon (1) the rationale for communication education, (2) principles underlying communication education as a subject of knowledge, and (3) a system of principles for guidance in the practical affairs of communication education.

In the first section arguments for communication education are advanced which include the "popular" cry that "we can't communicate." Physical and psychological survival through communication strategies. that allow for goal achievement and tolerance for change and ambiguity is also an underlying rationale. The argument which asserts that a body of knowledge and practice in communication and communication education exists is probably the most cogent.

The second section focuses upon principles and objectives of communication education in three areas of instruction: communication theory, communication research, and communication behaviors (skills). A taxonomy of objectives and principles in each of these areas is systematically explicated.

The final section of the philosophy discusses a comprehensive plan of communication education and curricula. Emphases at various levels and relevant domains of learning are discussed. A position regarding behavioral versus general objectives and responsibility for learning is advanced.

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A PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

Perhaps communication scholars have assumed that the inseparability of communication and educational processes requires little explication. However, in depth consideration of the function, nature, and scope of education in communication is a necessary and prerequisite concern for communication educators. At this point in time, little literature exists in the area of communication education. Although allied fields in the social sciences and liberal arts have some tradition and philosophy of education supporting their respective disciplines, the relatively new field of communication appears to have displayed no concern in this area. Therefore, this discussion attempts to systematically explicate a position regarding the function, nature, and scope of communication education. The subsequent discussion focuses on (1) the rationale for communication education, (2) principles underlying communication education as a subject of knowledge, and (3) a system of principles for guidance in the practical affairs of communication education.

Rationale for Communication Education

Arguments which seek to justify education in communication are varied. Popular discourse claims that many problems of society and of the individual are a result of breakdowns in communication.[1] People generally recognize the need for improved communication among nations of the world, between generations, on the job, in the family, and between individuals. The common cry is that "we don't communicate" or "we can't seem to communicate." Although many common problems are not essentially communication problems, there does appear to be a need in our complex, technological society for improvement of communication.

Some would even argue that human survival depends upon man's ability and knowledge in communication.[2] Physical and psychological survival, for example, may well depend upon alternatives to the use of power and authority. Personal, domestic, and international crises and conflicts are often perpetuated by, although not always caused by, inadequate knowledge and utilization of communication principles. Although society is beginning to recognize and utilize new channels such as hot lines, rumor centers, and crisis centers, we have not clearly diffused concern and knowledge of the other critical communication variables. If these additional needs are recognized, communication education

can provide strategies for receivers and sources of communication in our complex society. These communication strategies can provide not only the bases for achievement of goals, but also the capability to adapt to change and to change and to tolerate ambiguity among individuals, groups, organizations, and societies of the globe. In addition to a need for these capabilities, undoubtedly the need for new specialized communication skills involving computers, media, and other technologies will become more common for the formally educated as well as for the informally educated. These needs do tend to support the argument that physical and psychological survival can be enhanced through communication education.

Probably the easiest argument in favor of communication education to advance asserts that a body of knowledge on communication exists.[3] Researchers in mass communication, speech, psychology, sociology, language, linguistics, psycholinguistics, interpersonal communication, diffusion of innovations, business, small group communication, organizational communication, advertizing and others have contributed important theory and research of practical significance in communication. Recognition of commonalities among scholars and practitioners in these fields has been demonstrated by the relatively recent formation of the International Communication Association, departments of communication in universities and high schools, and communication curriculums in a few states. Although some research in communication education, per se, has emerged from these scholars, the paucity of good research on effects of various methods of communication education is probably the greatest weakness of the field. Scholars specializing in communication have argued, of course, that knowledge of communication variables, processes, and essential skills are necessary to, if not isomorphic with, the educational-learning process. As such, knowledge of communication is knowledge of knowledge of communication education. Also, they argue that this information is vital to education in all other academic disciplines.

Principles of Communication Education

In the past, communication has appeared to focus in three basic areas of instruction: Communication theory, communication research, and communication behaviors (skills).[4] The objectives of education in these three areas, however, have not been explicitly posited. Although it is useful to distinguish these differing focuses, general objectives cannot be strictly categorized as the exclusive concern of one particular area of instruction.

Rather, the general objectives of communication education frequently tend to be relevant to more than one area of communication education. In addition, these objectives not only span the previous focuses, but also include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning. Therefore, the following discussion explicates these general objectives of communication education, realizing the lack of mutually exclusive categories. Then, the subsequent section makes practical suggestions for focus and implementation of these objectives into the educational curriculum.

Communication Theory

In regard to communication theory, the following objectives of communication education are suggested:

I. Comprehension of the communication process. This objective a need to focus upon communication as a process.[5] This theoretical emphasis considers the communication process of interacting variables as a social or behavioral science.

   A. Formation of positive attitudes toward the communication process. Often this may require attitude change as well as attitude formation. Positive attitudes toward the study of the process may in some instances be prerequisite to it.

   B. Comprehension of man as a communication processing organism in the on going communication process. Although other social sciences view man as essentially political, economic, or psychological units, communication theory views man as essentially a communicating organism. Theory seeks to explain how man processes communication and why man responds in particular ways to differing processing.[6] Responses of comprehension, belief modification, value modification, attitude change, credibility perception, decision making, and overt action are central to communication theory about man.

C. Comprehension of the significant variables in the communication process. This objective involves recognition, identification, and classification of significant variables involved in the communication process. These variables, of course, include the human processing variables of the communication participant.

1. Comprehension of participant variables includes elements such as sensation, channeling, recognition of symbols, perception, cognition, retrieval, information, beliefs, values, attitudes, credibility perception (including attraction, trust, etc.), personality, decoding, storage, and encoding.

2. Comprehension of message variables includes verbal elements such as language codes, syntax, lexical choice, "style", arrangement, evidence, support, fear appeals, sidedness, etc. Message variables also include nonverbal elements such as the media and their respective properties, chronemics, vocalics, kinesics, proxemics, haptics, oculesics, and objectics.

3. Comprehension of contextual variables includes physical, social, and cultural contexts. Physical contexts, of course, are closely related to some nonverbal variables listed above. Social contexts exist upon a continum between interpersonal communication and mass communication contexts from which theory has been best generated. Cultural contexts have a pervasive influence in communication among people of differing cultures or subcultures.

D. Comprehension of the effects and interaction of significant communication variables in the communication process. This objective focuses upon the effects of participant, message, and contextual variables upon comprehension, beliefs, values, attitudes, credibility perception, decision-making, and overt action. Further, this objective emphasizes the effects of various "interacting" participant, message, and contextual variables upon the communication process as a whole or upon other communication variables specifically.

E. Comprehension of the differing social and cultural contexts of communication. These contexts have often supplied the content areas for specific courses in curricula. These social contexts include dyadic communication, one-to-many

communication, small group communication, organizational communication, institutional and organized persuasion, non-mediated mass communication (diffusion of innovations), and mediated mass communication. Of course, social contexts supplied by differing cultures and subcultures must also be included. All these social contexts are probably most relevant in marriage, family, business, social, and other forms or subcategories of social contexts.

F. Comprehension of the effects of differing contexts of communication in the communication process. This objective is concerned with the ways that contexts impinge upon the communication process to alter the significance of certain variables which, in turn, alter the process. For example, often organizational structures and mediated communication constrain feedback in the communication process and thereby probably alter at least comprehension and attitude effects. The overriding influence of cultures and subcultures upon the communication process is of pervasive significance.

Communication Research

In regard to communication research, the following objectives and principles for communication education are suggested:

II. Development and dissemination of research in Communication. Objectives for communication education in the instructional area of research are , of course, closely allied to those above on theory. Research which ultimately develops theory or mini-theories related to the previous section is essesntial to communication education. Often comprehension of theory is the result of dissemination of research. In regard to communication education both the practice of actual research and the dissemination of it are inseparable. The focus of communication theory is upon observable phenomena and generation of predictions. The function of research includes generation of predictions but more importantly includes the testing of the veracity of those predictions. A confirmed set of predictions, then, become theory. Generation of theory is directly related to the goals of communication education. First, this provides the content of communication about which communication education is concerned--theory. Second, education is a speicfic communication process itself. Tnerefore, study of theory and research in communication is the study of communication education theory. Development and dissemination of research in communication education theory are inseparable, prime goals of communication education.

A. Formation of positive attitudes toward development and dissemination of research in communication. Again, favorable attitudes are often instrumental, if not prerequisite to the desired outcome.

B. Comprehension and utlization of research methods in communication. Prerequisite to the understanding and enlightened dissemination of extant research is the understanding of methodology employed. In the broadest sense, no particular research methodology can be excluded on intellectual grounds. However, the practical utility and productivity of various methods may demand emphasis on particular ones. Generally, the most frequently employed methodologies produce experimental research, field research, case studies, and historical-critical research. The importance and utility of these approaches varies significantly.

1. Comprehension and utilization of experimental and field methods and research in communication education. Experimental methodology is inherently superior for scientifically testing predictions; therefore, for generation of theory.[7] The prime limitation upon experimental methodology is the controlled laboratory setting and operationalizations which inherently limit generalizability of results. Field methods, lacking in control and precision, produce much more generalizable results. As such, field methods can be used to increase the generalizability of previous experimental research or can be used to generate predictions to be taken into the laboratory and validated through experimentation. In addition, the combined use of experimental and field methods are most significant for applied research. They provide the best means of testing educational techniques and teaching methods of communication in the classroom and larger settings. The paucity of research on "methods" of communication education demands some current concern for applied research. However, the same techniques useful for generation of theory are also the best methodologies for research concerned with application. In essence, however, research on the "methods" of communica tion education" is also highly relevant to application of communication theory.

2. Comprehension of case and historical-critical methods and research in communication education. These humanistic approaches to communication research are also relevant Their strengths lie in their ability to systematically, efficiently, and creatively analyze communication behavior of either individuals or large masses, social

movements, etc. This flexibility and adaptability without constraints of controls necessary in experimentation is the primary advantage of these methodologies over experimental and perhaps even field methods. However, case and historical-critical methods, because of their epistemology, cannot scientifically test predictions. In terms of theory, their primary utility may be in generation of the theoretical predictions and generation of concern among other researchers for more relevant communication problems of individuals and societies. Parenthetically, it should be noted that, perhaps because of differing epistemology, predictions that have in the past been generated by case and historical-critical methodologies have generally not been amenable to scientific operationalization and testing in the laboratory. Finally, the historical-critical method, if it focuses upon significant contemporary communication behaviors and problems, possesses probably the best potential for dissemination of communication theory and research to society in general. For this particular type of communication education to occur, however, practitioners must disseminat some of their research in the popular media rather than in scholarly journals.

C. Comprehension and application of extant communication research. Briefly, stated, this objective suggests that communication educators should engender learning not only of theory that evolves from research but also knowledge of the research and research results in various theoretical areas previously discussed. Too often research in various areas has been insufficient for the generation of global theories. However, results from this research does provide guidelines of pratical significance and mini-theories[8] of value to sources, receivers, and other participants in the communication process.

D. Development of research methodology in communication education. Traditionally, communication researchers have borrowed methodologies from other fields and applied them with little or no adaptation. There is probably a need generate methodologies which are adapted to the study of the communication or communication or communication education process. For example, problems of sampling and procedures need particular scrutiny. Operationalization of concepts have been a problem in research which focuses upon application in the communication education context. One need only note research on educational media or that in speech education for examples.

Communication Behaviors

In regard to communication behaviors (skills) the following general objectives for communication education are suggested:

III. Participation in the communication process with more effective adaptive behaviors. This objective focuses upon the improvement of learned behaviors or skills related to the communication process. These behaviors span the three domains of learning: affective, psychmotor, and cognitive.

A. Formation of positive attitudes toward participation in the communication process. The desire or willingness to attempt communication or to utilize existing channels is often based upon attitudes toward others and attitudes formed as a result of past communication attempts. Positive reinforcement is often a necessary prerequisite for participation in the communication process. Participation, of course is prerequisite to learning of effective, adaptive behaviors.

B. Recognition and development of decoding behaviors. These behaviors, of course, include the traditional concerns of listening, and reading. However, they must be expanded to include critical analysis, judgemental consumption of mediated communication, decoding of strategic variables in persuasive messages, decoding nonverbal messages, and interpretation of data originating from technologies such as key punch machines and computers. Because of the primary amount of time man spends decoding, more emphasis should be placed on decoding than encoding.

C. Recognition and development of encoding behaviors. Again, these behaviors include the traditional concerns of speaking, writing, typing, etc. However, emphasis should be extended to behaviors such as media utilization, key punching, data processing etc. This may well involve knowledge of new languages (i.e., fortran) and new methods of message composition. Skills involving the encoding of nonverbal messages whether interpersonal or technologically mediated ought to be included . Finally, the application of communication theory to strategic encoding is perhaps the prime skill involved in the communication behavior of encoding.

D. Recognition and control of variables in the participant's own behavior which affect the communication process. These variables include those which apply to both receivers and sources of communication. They involve encoding and decoding of messages, but extend beyond that to include personal variables of comprehension, beliefs, values, attitudes, credibility perception as well as overt action. This recognition and control typically involves the following:
1. Application of communication theory to effective and adaptive decoding of verbal and nonverbal messages.
2. Application of communication theory to effective and adaptive encoding of verbal and nonverbal messages.

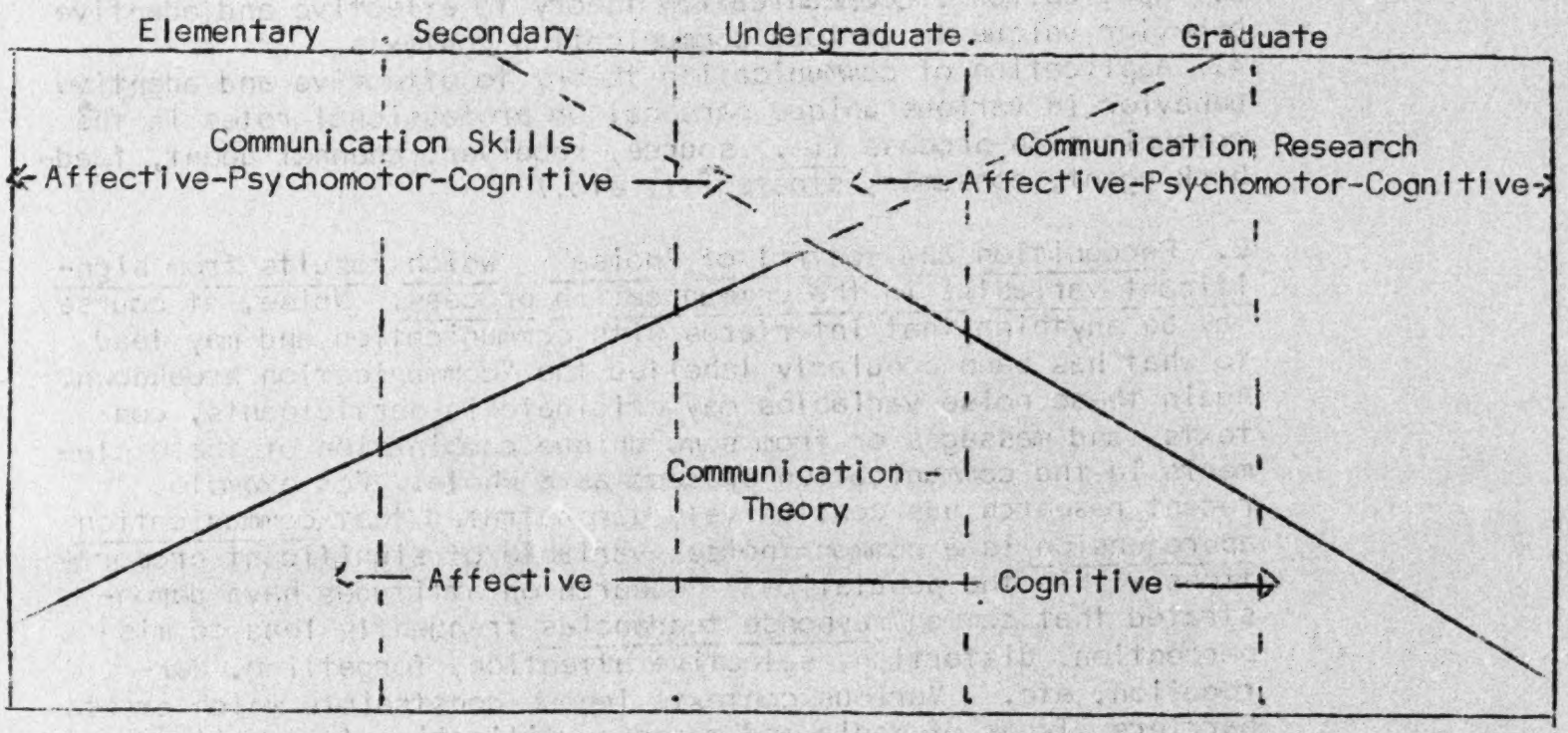
3. Application of communication theory to effective and adaptive behavior unique to various communication contexts.
4. Application of communication theory to effective and adaptive behavior in various unique personal or professional roles in the communication process (ie., source, receiver, channel agent, feedback agent, consumer, strategist, etc.)

E. Recognition and control of "noise" which results from significant variables in the communication process. Noise, of course, may be anything that interferes with communication and may lead to what has been popularly labelled the "communication breakdown." Again these noise variables may originate in participants, contexts, and messages or from some unique combination of these elements in the communication process as a whole. For example, recent research has conclusively demonstrated that communication apprehension is a common "noise" variable of significant proportions within the population. Research on attitudes have demonstrated that common response tendancies frequently lead to misperception, distortion, selective attention, forgetting, derrogation, etc. Various contexts impose constraints which create barriers. Types of media and message utilization freguently distory, create noise, or lead to communication "barriers and breakdowns."

In summary, the above three areas of instruction--theory, research, behavior--are the focus of communication education. As this formerly diverse field of communication draws closer together, realizing the commonalities of interests and the practicality or expediency of administrative unification, common principles of communication education must be posited and examined. The objectives and principles supplied above serve at least as a beginning point for establishing some basic and perhaps common principles for education in our field.

Practical Guidelines for Communication Education

Although we may tenatively agree upon the rationale and basic goals or principles of communication education, the practical problems of implementation of areas of instruction in curricula remain. The following model suggests a brief plan of communication education from earliest through graduate levels. Relative emphases among theory, behavior (skills), and research areas at each level of education is depicted. In each of these areas of instruction, it is possible to target objectives upon particular domains. For example, the selected objective in a particular area may initially target upon the affective domain; however, this may change along a continuum according to the educational development of the individual in communication. Therefore, the model suggests at what stage of development particular domains--affective, psychomotor- cognitive--should be emphasized. Finally, the diagram posits a continuum concerning the nature of objectives and responsiblity for learning.



Emphases in Instructional Areas

At the earliest levels of communication education (see model), emphasis should be upon development of communication behaviors with relatively minor emphasis upon theory. In the theory area of instruction, the affective domain should be targeted initially. As the individual advances through elementary, secondary education, the emphases on the two areas of instruction shoud slowly reverse. By the time an individual is at the secondary level about half of instruction should focus on theory; about half, on skills (with some emphasis on cognitive skills). At this level attitudes toward research ought to be established and some research skills ought to be developed. Then as the individual enters undergraduate communication education, the emphasis should clearly and predominantly focus upon theory with only a minor emphasis upon skills. At this level of skills development, focus should be upon the cognitive domain--the affective and psychomotor behaviors ought to have already been mastered. Indeed, this type of emphasis in areas of instruction at the undergraduate level would be possible if previous communication education could fulfill its function.

The undergraduate level of communication education should represent in terms of instructional areas a transition in emphasis from communication skills to communication research with a major focus upon theory. The cognitive domain should be the primary target of objectives except in the area of communication research. Affective and psychomotor domains involving attitudes towards communication research and skills should be emphasized along with cognitive understanding of research which supports theory. The graduate level of communication education should be a transition from predominant emphasis upon theory to a predominant emphasis upon research in communication. Formation of positive attitudes toward all instructional areas, and mastery of

communication research skills should have already been acccmpolished. Objectives should at this point have been focused exclusively in the cognitive domain. Here the process of communication education becomes cyclical--communication research focuses upon theory or mini-theory development and upon application of theory and research to discover knowledge about communicative behaviors.

Curriculum or course offerings that could implement this approach to communication education might well differ drastically according to educational level or special needs. Probably the most common approach to curriculum apparently involves developing courses related to specific social contexts: Interpersonal (in marriage, business, etc.), Small group (committees, family, etc.), One-to-many (public speaking, editorials, reporting, etc.), Instructional Communication (Instructional technology, Educational media, Instructional methods, etc.), Nonmediated Mass Communication (cultural and cross-cultural, diffusions of innovations, etc.), and perhaps even others. Skill and research offerings of course, tend to be much more diverse in approach or to be integrated into categories such as those above. Although many approaches are feasible, models (or taxonomies) of each area of instruction (skills, theory, research) ought to be developed. Then, it would be possible to rationally decide what type pf curriculum would best implement learning. In the area of theory, for example, the social context approach to course development might be chosen in favor of courses that target specific communication variables; or some combination of the two might be chosen as more comprehension. These kinds of decisions would depend upon educational level of instruction and upon the model developed for each area of communication education.

Formulation of Objectives

A final practical concern of communication education involves the nature of objectives and responsibility for learning (see model). A continuum is suggested. This philosophy of communication education notes that at the earliest levels of education the responsibility for learning rests almost excluselely upon the teacher; therefore, behavioral objectives ought to be utilized almost exclusively. At the latest levels of communication education, the responsibility for learning rests almost exclusively upon the student; therefore, teacher established behavioral objectives are unnecessary and only general guidelines should be provided. Since this transition should gradually occur, the undergraduate level probably respresents the point at which equal responsibility ought to be shared by the instructor and student. Some behavioral objectives may be necessary but testing based on normal curves and competition are also appropriate. In order for the individual to learn to assume responsibility and to mature, he must gradually be allowed to assume more responsiblity for his own learning.

In order for behavioral objectives in communication education to be of value, they must be based upon relevant general objectives. That is, the judgments made about the general nature and goals of any course or field of instructions are crucial to the development of meaningful behavioral objectives. Careful attention to reasonable, attainable general objectives must precede any consideration of behavioral objectives.

The decision to employ behavioral objectives or general objectives with traditional testing methods or some combination of both approaches depends upon the level of communication education at which learning is occuring.

The decision depends also upon the maturity and responsibility of the learner. Certainly, neither extreme is a magic solution. Traditional methods of instruction and testing place a great deal of responsibility for learning upon the student. Testing, using "normal curves," encouraging competitive learning environments, and avoiding clear specification of objectives for the student allows him to establish his own goals and leads necessarily to assumption of responsibility and to maturation. Behavioral objectives place responsibility for learning upon the instructor and the educational establishment. This approach emphasizes mastery through meeting previously established criteria. Clear specification of criteria forces the instructor toward making important decisions in regard to learning outcomes. The requirement of observable, measurable outcomes of learning allows for clear assessment and accountability. (In a time when education is under attack these characteristics of behavioral objectives become more appealing.) However, they are not magic or even appropriate at all levels of education in communication.

Conclusion

The need for a comprehensive and unified philosophy of communication education is readily apparent. Formerly diverse disciplines have already been unified for communicaion education at various levels of the educational process. If it is possible for us to agree upon goals, principles, and curriculum development, greater progress in our general, common task can be accomplished. Once these general aims have been established, the time will be ripe for scholars in the new, unified field of communication to seek certification standards in public educational institutions, and to establish curricula to implement communication education. This task must be undertaken at local, state, and national levels. The responsibility for such an undertaking must be assumed not only by individual communication scholars and departments, but also by organizations such as the International Communication Association.

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